

# **SCHAMYL AND CIRCASSIA**

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Schamyl and Circassia by Dr. Friedrich Wagner & Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie

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**DR. FRIEDRICH WAGNER & KENNETH R. H. MACKENZIE**

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# SCHAMYL AND CIRCASSIA.

Chiefly from Materials collected by

DR. FRIEDRICH WAGNER.

EDITED, WITH NOTES, BY

KENNETH R. H. MACKENZIE, F.S.A.

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN.

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## PREFACE.

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I HAVE little to say in this preface, the rather as everything requisite has been said in the book itself, or in the Notes thereupon.

One word of explanation, however, is necessary.

It is as to my share, a very small one, in its production. In looking about for a book from which some impartial information respecting the Caucasus might be gained, I found, as did Diogenes in his useless search for an honest man, great difficulty. At length, I lighted upon Dr. Wagner's work, which seemed to be the least biassed as well as the most trustworthy, and I resolved upon submitting it to the public. Here and there, however, it has been necessary to modify or correct the statements of the author; and for such modifications the reader must hold me responsible. The work, therefore, without being an original one, is not merely a translation.

I have ventured to add to the volume two short tales (by the kind permission of Miss Cook), illustrative of the habits and feelings, as well as I have been able to perceive them, peculiar to the wandering tribes located near the Caspian.

A Geographical Gazetteer of the Forts, prepared from various authorities, has also been deemed likely to be acceptable.

With these words, I bid the reader farewell.

KENNETH R. H. MACKENZIE.

*May, 1854.*

# SCHAMYL AND CIRCASSIA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE PROPHETS OF THE CAUCASUS.

*Schamyl at Himri—The triple escape—Mansoor Bey, the first prophet of the Caucasus—Kasi Mullah, the teacher of Schamyl—His heroic death.*

ON the eighteenth of October, 1832, the Russians undertook the victorious siege of the Caucasian mountain-fortress of Himri, into which their enemies, under the generalship of the chief Kasi Mullah and the Murid\* Schamyl, had thrown themselves and forces. For some days the battle had raged with unheard-of courage on both sides; but, notwithstanding the superior might of the Russians, rendered more dreadful by reason of their fearful artillery-trains, all proposals of surrender were indignantly rejected by the valiant besieged. Fanatically chanting verses from the Koran, they sent forth death on leaden wings into the ranks of their adversaries. Although the threefold rampart of this fort was entirely surrounded, the towers already reduced to ruin by the cannon of the enemy, still

\* Murids are members of a holy sect, who have devoted themselves to death for the faith.



Kasi Mullah and Schamyl would hear nothing of surrender. The reddening dawn of that eighteenth day of October broke, and with it began the storming of the fortress, which, after the bloodiest fight, terminated in favour of the Russians. Kasi Mullah and many Murids fell at Schamyl's side; he himself received a bullet in his side, as well as a wound from a bayonet; yet he broke forth his way amidst the slaughter, disappeared, and within two years, the Caucasus echoed with the fame of his prowess.

It has often been asserted in the most various quarters, that Schamyl was taken at Himri by the Russians, conducted to St. Petersburg, placed in the army as an officer, and subsequently sent against his own countrymen; but being once insulted by his superior, he took the first opportunity of returning to the ranks of Russia's foes. It is even related that when afterwards a wounded Russian officer was brought to him, Schamyl recognised in him one of his best friends during his stay in St. Petersburg, and after retaining him a short while in his company, set him at liberty. These rumours have often, of course, been detailed with the utmost variety and circumstantiality, which lent additional charm to their credibility.

The story which we have just related is indeed true, but with the difference that the hero of it was not Schamyl, but his friend Daniel Bey, now his companion in arms.

Daniel Bey had been elevated to the rank of Russian general, but he deserted, and went from Tiflis to

Skliissia, his native country, where he was sultan, and where he raised the standard of revolt. The Russian Colonel Belgrade marched against Skliissia with a considerable force, and took the place by storm. Daniel escaped, and joined himself with Schamyl, who ranked him among his staff officers.

But to return to Schamyl.

It may easily be imagined that the mysterious escape of Schamyl afforded ample material to the mountaineers for many wonderful stories. For instance, there was a legend current, that Schamyl had really been slaughtered in the storming of Himri, but that Allah had breathed new life into his nostrils, in order to give a sign to the people, by this restoration of the Murid, that he was destined to become the leader of his companions in the faith.

In the year 1834, Schamyl was again preserved in an extraordinary manner. The scene of this occurrence was Tshunsak, the residence of the *khan* of the Avars. Kasi Mullah had rejected the alliance of the *Khanum* Pashubike (in the Russian interest) in 1830. Afterwards, Hamsad Bey, the successor of this prophet, took possession of Tshunsak; but not till he had sent for the *khanum's* two sons, who had come to deal traitorously with him, and, receiving them in his tent, had them murdered, subsequently executing their mother.

The land of Daghestan was not wanting in avengers, and the new chief of the Murids fell by the hand of two of his noblest and bravest companions.

The two brothers, Osman and Hadji Murad, had

been brought up with Omar Khan, the elder son of the klanum of Tshunsak; instigated by their own father, they struck down Hamsad Bey in the mosque. Osman himself fell under the blows of the Murids, but his brother raised an agitation among the people. A great number of Murids were slain in the temple, and those who escaped took refuge in the towers. Schamyl, who had followed Hamsad Bey to the mosque, was among the number. They defended themselves with the courage of despair. Hadji Murad gave directions to set the tower on fire, and but two of the band escaped the flames. The one was the Murid who had sworn upon the Koran to keep secret the conspiracy, and yet had betrayed it to Hadji Murad. He was caught and committed to the flames alive. The other was Schamyl, who again disappeared in a mysterious manner.

The third escape of Schamyl from a like danger was not less marvellous. It took place in 1839, at the siege of the fortress of Achulko, where a similar disregard of life and an unflagging energy was evinced. The women of the Tshetshenzes stood in fluttering garments on the steep cliffs, and dashed down tremendous masses of rock, or exercised the firelock like their husbands, and excited them to the combat with dreadful cries. "I do not understand how," it was subsequently written by a Russian officer present at the siege—"I do not understand how it was that everything seemed so simple, and so matter of course, at that time. But the most cowardly among us were at that hour furious